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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 002873

SIPDIS

STATE FOR G/TIP, WHA/PPC, AND WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/30/2014

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SUBJECT: CASA ALIANZA HONDURAS IS NOT LINKED TO BRUCE HARRIS SCANDAL; EMBASSY RECOMMENDS CONTINUED USG FUNDING

REF: STATE 269517

Classified By: Ambassador Larry Palmer; Reasons 1.5 d.

1. (C) PolOff met November 8 with Gustavo Zelaya, Legal Assistance Program Coordinator for Casa Alianza. Zelaya told PolOff that Casa Alianza had been fully cooperating with the Public Ministry investigation into the alleged crimes of Casa Alianza Central American Director Bruce Harris in Honduras. Zelaya said that Casa Alianza was also conducting an internal investigation, but emphasized that it was Harris and not Casa Alianza Honduras that were alleged to have committed wrongful acts.

2. (C) PolOff spoke again December 29 with Zelaya, who said that it was Casa Alianza's understanding that the Public Ministry investigation had found no wrongdoing by Casa Alianza.

3. (C) Special Prosecutor for Children Nora Urbina, an excellent Embassy contact and upcoming IVP grantee, told PolOff December 29 that the Public Ministry had completed its investigation of Casa Alianza and its various shelters and had found no wrongdoing. She particularly noted that the Public Ministry had found no evidence of any cases of sexual abuse and/or exploitation. Urbina said that the investigations had found that Harris, and not Casa Alianza, was responsible for Harris' actions and there was no wrongdoing by Casa Alianza. She declined to state what the Public Ministry's conclusions had been about whether or not Harris' actions constituted crimes, as this has yet to be made public. She said that the Public Ministry was still working on an investigation into alleged sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and would release the conclusions of the three investigations (Harris, Casa Alianza, and the Catholic Church) at the same time when all three were ready.

4. (C) PolOff spoke December 30 with Casa Alianza Honduras Director Jose Manuel Capellin, who has retained the title of Associate Executive Director of Latin American Programs. He told PolOff that, although each Casa Alianza country office now reports directly to Covenant House in New York, he is doing some regional coordination. Capellin's comments echoed Zelaya's. He made it clear that it was Casa Alianza's policy to immediately report to Honduran authorities any evidence that came to light about alleged child abuse or exploitation, as they had done in the Harris case. Capellin reiterated that Casa Alianza Honduras was not culpable in any way for Harris' acts.

5. (C) Comment: Casa Alianza has been fully cooperative with Ministry of Public Security (police) and Public Ministry (prosecutors) in the Harris case and subsequent investigations, and received public praise from Minister of Public Security Oscar Alvarez, a man not known for showering praise on NGOs, for the forthright manner in which it brought information to Honduran authorities after Harris' actions came to their attention. Once the initial publicity over Harris' actions died down, Casa Alianza appears to have been able to continue operating as one of the key nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on children's issues in Honduras. Post is in regular contact with Casa Alianza on issues such as gangs and rehabilitation, street children, extrajudicial killings, trafficking in persons and commercial sexual exploitation. Post is not aware of any information that would lead EmbOffs to recommend a cutoff of USG assistance. Post believes that the USG should continue supporting Casa Alianza Honduras. End Comment.
Palmer